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ABSTRACT

A study tested a conceptual model of attrition, the Tinto (1975) model, on a group of General Educational Development (GED) examinees and on a comparison group of traditional high school graduates from a single public community college. The sample consisted of 198 GED students and 201 traditional high school graduates who entered Queensborough Community College, City University of New York, in the Fall 1981 semester. The instrument used was one developed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) that was designed to tap the major dimensions of the Tinto model--specifically, levels of academic integration, social integration, institutional commitment, and goal commitment. Results supported the predictive validity of the Tinto model in identifying potential dropouts among GED examinees as well as for the comparison group. It was found that for GED examinees first-year grade point average was the most important predictor of persistence; institutional commitment was the most important predictor for the traditional high school graduates; and the two groups were not statistically different in the rate of persistence. Results imply that institutions must address facilitation of academic integration, possibly through an effective academic advisement and orientation program. (YLB)

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AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

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RESEARCH BRIEF

GED TESTING SERVICE OF THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION • AUGUST 1985 • NO. 7

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Persistence of GED and Traditional Students at a Public Community College: A Test of a Conceptual Model

Stephen Beltzer

The decline in the number of high school graduates over the last decade has caused colleges and universities to place greater emphasis on recruitment and retention programs. Many of these institutions have been directing their energies toward attracting new markets of nontraditional students. One group of nontraditional students whose attendance has increased at certain institutions, particularly at urban community colleges, are GED examinees. For many institutions, like the City University of New York, GED examinees are beginning to comprise a substantial segment of the student population. In 1982, 14 percent of the freshman class of the City University of New York were GED recipients. Institutions that are admitting these students in large numbers must also be concerned with their retention.

Previous research with GED examinees has focused primarily on the test itself and its ability to predict academic success in college. There has been little research examining persistence behavior of GED examinees and how these students actually integrate into the academic and social systems of the institution.

This brief summarizes Beltzer (1984). The study was designed to test a conceptual model of attrition, the Tinto model (Tinto, 1975), on a group of GED examinees and on a comparison group of traditional high school graduates from a single public community college. This particular model (Fig. 1) posits that persistence at an institution is largely determined by the level of academic and social integration that student have achieved with the institution and not necessarily by the personal characteristics students bring with them when they enter. This model, previously tested with a traditional student population at both a four year public and private institution, was found useful in predicting freshman year persistence. It was the intent of this study to see if this model was applicable in predicting freshman year persistence with a nontraditional student body in a community college setting.

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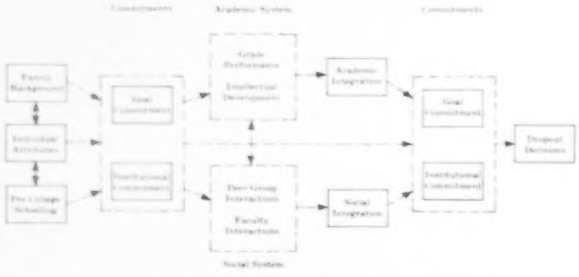
Data Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted during the Spring 1982 semester. The sample consisted of 198 GED students and 201 traditional high school graduates who entered Queensborough Community College in the Fall 1981 semester. Registration records of these students were examined in the Fall 1982 semester in order to identify persisters and dropouts. Students who had registered for the Fall 1982 semester were classified as persisters, while those who did not register that term were classified dropouts.

Previous research conducted with GED students also showed a majority of male subjects, typically veterans in the present study, 55% of the GED students were women, many of them mothers returning to college to obtain some career training.

The instrument used in the study was the one developed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), designed to tap the major dimensions of the Tinto model; specifically, levels of academic integration, social integration, institutional commitment, and goal commitment. Three additional items were added by the author to aid in the creation of factors more consistent with the Tinto model. Responses to the questionnaire, which was administered during the latter

FIGURE 1



A Conceptual Schema for Dropout from College

Source: Tinto, V. (1975). Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 89-125
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part of the Spring 1982 semester, were factor analyzed in order to construct factor based subscales. Six factors were identified as: Academic and Intellectual Development, Peer Group Interactions, Institutional Commitment, Informal Relations with Faculty, Faculty Concern for Teaching and Student Development, and Goal Commitment. An additional variable used in the analysis was students' first year grade point average, which was obtained from students' records. The factor scores along with students' GPA served as the predictor variables for the study.

Point biserial correlations and discriminant analysis were used to explain the relationship between the predictor variables and persistence for the GED examinees and the comparison group of traditional high school graduates. Analysis of variance and multiple regression were used in the ancillary analyses showing relationships between certain background characteristics and persistence.

Results

The results of the investigation supported the predictive validity of the Tinto Model in identifying potential dropouts among GED examinees as well as for a comparison group of traditional high school graduates from the same public community college. For the GED examinees , the prediction equation was able to correctly classify 81% of the persisters and 74% of the dropouts, and 80% of the persisters and 74% of the dropouts for the traditional high school graduates. Major findings included:

- GED examinees, *first year GPA*, was the most important predictor of persistence;
- Institutional commitment was found to be the most important predictor for the traditional high school graduates;
- Peer Group Relations and Informal Relations with Faculty had no relationship with persistence for either the GED examinees or the traditional high school graduates;
- **There was no statistically significant difference between the GED examinees and the traditional high school graduates in the rate of persistence.** Older GED examinees, however, had slightly higher persistence rates than ones between the ages of 17 and 19. About 85% of the 167 GED examinees who were 20 or older compared to 68% of the 31 GED examinees between 17 and 19, were classified as persisters. The correlation between age and persistence for the GED examinees was .14.
- GED examinees were a somewhat older group compared to their traditional high school graduate counterparts; however, the ages of the GED examinees appeared younger than those reported in earlier research with this population. In the present study, the mean and median ages for GED examinees were 26.8 and 24.3 respectively compared to 19.7 and 18.7 for traditional high school graduates.

Implications

The results of this study have certain implications for those institutions that admit large numbers of GED students. GED examinees remain an excellent source of potential students for many institutions, particularly community colleges, and their recruitment should be encouraged. Colleges committed to the admission of these students must be prepared to take necessary action that will contribute to their persistence and program completion. The study found that the most important factor in predicting persistence for these students was academic performance; therefore, the institution must address certain areas that will facilitate academic integration. One way in which this might be accomplished is through a quality academic advisement and orientation program.

Surveys of action programs designed to improve retention confirm that quality advisement programs can successfully reduce attrition (Beal and Noel, 1980; Macmillan & Kester, 1973). Beal and Noel (1980) point out that inadequate advising was reported to be the most important reason for attrition. For GED examinees and other nontraditional students, a quality advisement program is important for several reasons.

There was no statistically significant difference between the GED students and the traditional high school graduates in the rate of persistence.

TABLE 1

Crosstabulation of Rate of Persistence by Group Membership

	GED (N=198)	H.S. (N=201)	
Dropouts	N=35 (17.7)	N=38 (18.9)	N=73 (18.3)
Persisters	N=163 (82.3)	N=163 (81.1)	N=326 (81.7)
	N=198 (100.0]	N=201 (100.0)	N=399 (100.9)

Chi Square = .101 df=1 p=.75

A number of GED examinees have been away from any form of institutional education for many years. These students may be unfamiliar with the overall structure of higher education; which might include knowledge of curriculum requirements, course selection, or how to adequately prepare for a career. The same problem could hold true for younger GED examinees who dropped out of high school prior tGED starly in their senior year, having missed many senior activities aimed

at preparing students for college (e.g. meeting with guidance counselors, being exposed to visits from college representatives, career information days, etc.).

Foreign born GED examinees may tend to confuse various careers, basing their knowledge about them on how that career is perceived in their culture. For example, some foreign students may think "engineering" and "technology" are synonymous because in many countries they are. This becomes a problem when they begin to pursue a course of study, not realizing what is involved and where it will eventually lead.

Consequently, GED freshman, probably more than any other group of new students, need proper personal academic and career counseling prior to beginning classes. The academic difficulty that many of these students may experience may not be caused by lack of ability, but rather by a feeling of academic frustration. This academic frustration which may result in their dropping out could be attributed to poor course selection, unrealistic career goals, or an improper balance between academic course load and family or employment obligations.

Creamer (1980) suggests that quality advisement programs should be developmental in nature, and be designed to provide accurate, consistent information to students. Mash (1978) believes that advisement programs should incorporate three basic elements: advisors who view advisement as important, and therefore are recognized and rewarded for their efforts; a training program for all those involved in advisement; and a thorough understanding of the students' interests developed by effective pre-admission data. The recommendation here supports these ideas as well as the point made by Macmillan and Kester (1973), that any effective advisement program should be one of "will" rather than of "means." Hopefully, institutions that are interested in improving retention will develop advisement programs that incorporate these suggestions.

Another way in which institutions might address academic integration is through remediation. Community colleges are characterized by and often criticized for the vast amounts of time and money spent (Cohen & Brawer, 1981; Yess, 1979) on remedial programs for students who come to the institution unprepared to do college level work. No doubt, the admission of many GED examinees who fall into this category contributes to this problem. Many of these students, after seeing the number of remedial courses they need, become disenchanted with the institution and eventually leave. For others, particularly those students whose native language is not English, remediation is obviously necessary.

Unlike some of the traditional high school graduates examined in this study, GED examinees do not appear to have the same degree of "mobility" when it comes to opportunities for higher education. This is due to a number of reasons: poor academic qualifications, limited financial resources, and family responsibilities. GED examinees' initial experience with any form of higher education will be most critical, because it is uncertain whether these students will return to college once they drop out, as is the case with many younger and traditional college students. Proper academic advisement and career counseling is one way to help these students to successfully adapt to the academic system of the college. Hopefully, this level of integration will contribute to the retention and degree completion of GED examinees.

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